

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4502

May 27, 2003

The Honorable Ann M. Veneman
Secretary of Agriculture
Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Veneman:

I am writing to express my concern over the Department's introduction of irradiated meat into school lunches. Many parents are concerned with the possible health effects of eating irradiated meat. I strongly encourage the Department to proceed with caution and carefully implement the distribution of irradiated meat to ensure that school's have the choice between irradiated and non-irradiated beef.

The scientific debate over the safety of meat irradiation is far from conclusive. While the process has been found safe by the Food and Drug Administration, the European Union has banned irradiated meat citing research that links irradiation with higher cancer rates. Similar results have been found by a wide range of national and international public health experts. It also remains uncertain how these health effects could be compounded in the bodies of developing children.

If this program is to proceed as mandated in the 2002 Farm Bill, the Department must provide safeguards that will give school districts a real choice between irradiated and non-irradiated products. This means disclosing *all* research pertaining to the health risks of irradiated meat and guaranteeing school districts the option of purchasing non-irradiated beef as part of the USDA commodity program.

Parents have the right to make an informed decision on the type of food their children eat in school. I trust that you will consider these concerns before proceeding any further with the school lunch irradiated meat program. Thank you.

Sincerely,



PATRICK LEAHY
United States Senator